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THE CATHOLIC LAYMAN.

Ḑlōir do Dhia aḥ rḥa hárōuib, aḡur ríodcáin aḡr an dealaḡ deaḡtōil do na dáoinib.

LUKE ii. 14.

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TO OUR READERS.

WHEN a new publication issues its first number to the world, and solicits the favourable consideration of those into whose hands it may chance to fall, its readers have a right to expect some information as to its character and objects, as well as the means by which it proposes to carry those objects into effect. This expectation is most fair and reasonable; and as it is our anxious desire to conciliate the good wishes of all impartial and intelligent men, we proceed to state a few of the motives which have led to this publication, and to the choice of the title under which we appear.

And, in the first place, it is necessary to warn our readers that we propose to ourselves a more important task than merely to amuse the listless portion of the public, or to while away an idle hour. In the present condition of our native land—de-

pressed, impoverished, distracted by a variety of evils—it would argue a cold and heartless indifference to its true and permanent welfare, if, possessing, as we believe we do, the means and the capability of being useful, we were to devote our own time, and that of our readers, to the gratification of idle curiosity. A story is told of a certain philosopher, in ancient times, who, despising the opinions of his neighbours, adopted the whimsical idea of living in a tub. On one occasion, when the city in which he resided was besieged by a foreign enemy, this eccentric individual commenced, one morning, to roll his tub up and down the market-place; and, on being asked his motive for this singular conduct, he replied, that he did not wish to be idle when every one around him was busy in resisting the enemy, but that he could find nothing better to do.

Now, we do not wish to imitate the example of this useless member of society, or to roll our tub after his fashion. We believe that we can be more beneficially employed, in endeavouring to arouse our countrymen from the state of lethargy and ignorance in which too many of them are plunged, and to apply the talents and abilities with which God has endowed them, in the noblest of all pursuits—the search for truth. It is useless to attempt to disguise the fact, that Ireland has long been neglected by those whose duty and whose interest it was to have improved the minds and developed the intellects of her quick-witted and intelligent sons. Every foreign and English traveller who visits our shores is struck by the sharpness of mind and ready apprehension which prevail, even among the humblest peasantry. They cannot conceal their astonishment that a people so highly gifted by Providence, and endowed with such mental resources, should yet be sunk so low in the scale of civilization, and exhibit such lamentable proofs of ignorance and error.

It is foreign to our purpose to dwell long on this melancholy state of things, or on the causes which have contributed to make our island a proverb and a by-word among the nations of Europe. It is plain that if the natural instructors of the people—those in whom their faith and confidence were reposed—had exerted themselves as they should have done, even during the past half century, we should now witness the fruits of such exertions in the increasing spread of knowledge and industry, of peace and harmony and good-will. But they allowed each generation to grow up in the same unenlightened prejudices in which their forefathers lived. While the world around them was advancing in light and knowledge, Ireland was doomed to behold her children arrayed in bitter hostility against each other—wasting, in angry and acrimonious strife, those faculties and energies which, if rightly directed, would have commanded respect abroad, and diffused comfort and happiness at home.

In what way, then, is this evil to be remedied? If mutual distrust and ill-will prevail so extensively among us—if contentious wrangling, especially upon religious differences, has so long

been the curse and bane of Ireland, how shall we commence our efforts for the cure of these fatal disorders? Now, on this point, the advice which we see frequently put forward, both in Parliament and in the newspapers, is as follows: "Religion is an affair between each man's conscience and God: why, then, need you give yourself any trouble about your neighbour's creed? Is it not better to let each individual choose his own religion for himself, without any intrusion from others? If all parties in Ireland were content to act in this manner, and put religious differences out of sight altogether, the country would be at peace, and we should hear no more of these controversial disputes, which distract men's minds, and prevent them from attending to the more pressing and urgent business of their farms, shops, or other callings."

Now, however well-meant this advice may be, we believe that it is utterly false and delusive. We are convinced, that it is impossible to adopt it, if we would: and that we ought not to adopt it, even if we could. Let us put out of sight for a moment, what is going on in the Continent and America, and confine our view to the state of England and Ireland; and then ask any man of common sense, whether, in the present state of men's minds, religion can be thus quietly thrust into the back ground, as if it were of no importance whatever? It is a notorious fact, that a convulsive movement of religious opinion is in progress, such as these countries have not witnessed for three hundred years. It does not exist merely in one locality, nor is it confined to a particular class of men; on the contrary, it has spread, like an electric current, to the remotest corners of the empire, and has pervaded all ranks of society. The premier duke of England in his ancestral castle, the learned professor in the time-honoured University of Oxford, the peasant in the lonely wilds of Connemara and Kerry, have alike felt its influence, and bent beneath its power. There is scarcely a newspaper published which does not contain some new fact or other bearing upon this all-important question. We are daily informed that some fresh individuals, few or many, as the case may be, have relinquished their old religious belief—that a Roman Catholic has become a Protestant, or a Protestant has become a Roman Catholic. It is manifestly impossible, therefore, to compel men to be neutral on the question of religion. We might as well attempt to stop the tide when it is sweeping across the broad Atlantic, and dashing against our shores, as to check the agitation of religious opinion which is going on around us. The circumstances of the time are entirely beyond our control—we must adapt our conduct to the position in which we find ourselves placed. Whether we will or no, men's minds are now occupied upon the question of religion, with an earnestness and intensity which is altogether unparalleled. We may, if we will, exert ourselves to guide their judgment aright, and supply them with help, to arrive at the knowledge of the truth; but it is worse than useless to endeavour to divert them from the task.